ATHENS, Greece — Greece's left-wing opposition leader briefly stepped away from ***politics*** Friday for a mandatory stint in the military.

[*Stefanos Kasselakis*](https://apnews.com/article/kasselakis-syriza-election-opposition-leader-270ec6d5d03e3db5c0b825977c88c425), 35, appeared at an artillery training camp in central Greece to start his brief service in the country's conscription-based armed forces.

A U.S.-based businessman until his unexpected election to the Syriza party's leadership in September, Kasselakis is expected to spend less than three weeks in the army.

Most Greek men must serve up to 12 months. But Kasselakis was exempt until his return from the U.S. because he had lived there since age 14 and is entitled to a reduced six-month stint, most of which he can buy off.

Kasselakis said Friday it would be an “honor ... to serve the country I love.”

He will undergo some basic training at a camp near Thebes, 100 kilometers (62 miles) from Athens. Initially, Kasselakis [*had expressed a desire*](https://apnews.com/article/greece-kasselakis-military-service-opposition-syriza-644503b8ad1b739939b45c83d766238f) to be stationed somewhere more remote — near the land border with Turkey or on one of the eastern Aegean Sea islands.

Kasselakis' surprise election as leader of Syriza was followed by a [*tumultuous few months*](https://apnews.com/article/greece-politics-opposition-syriza-crisis-31cf0333729a79b5d3bc1f27832d9507) of internal strife as the party jockeyed closer to the political center and slipped to third place in opinion polls.

Polls say Syriza is still trailing some 20 percentage points behind the governing center-right New Democracy party. But it is back in second place and Kasselakis has consolidated his grip on the party that led the government on a radical left-wing platform in 2015-2019.

Greece's first openly gay party leader, Kasselakis strongly backed parliament's adoption last month of a landmark law [*legalizing same-sex marriage*](https://pronto.associatedpress.com/web/search/text?all=false&sourceType=ap&dateRangeType=live&mediaSortType=newest&pagesize=100&viewType=list&keyword=slug:greece-same&storyType=all&mediatype=text&pagenumber=0) in the majority Orthodoc Christian country.